

**2 Peter 3:1-9**  
**October 22, 2017**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: Have you ever encountered someone who has questioned the doctrine that “Christ will come a second time?” If yes, how did you deal with it?

Q: Think about all the conversations you’ve had over the years with others who are seeking God. Did the doctrine of the “second coming” ever come up? [Guessing many will say “no.”]

Q: Why do you think it’s hardly talked about?

- Not comfortable with personal level of knowledge on this doctrine
- Not the focal point when leading people to Christ

Like many of you, the doctrine of the second coming is rarely touched in most conversations I have with others. It’s so “futuristic” that it often doesn’t feel relevant to the spiritual issues being discussed at the time. Yet we know it’s an integral part of the overall gospel message. Jesus not only manifested Himself in the flesh to walk among us, not only died on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins, not only was He resurrected from the dead, not only has He ascended into heaven now sitting at the right hand of God as our Chief Priest, ***but He is also coming back a second time!!!!***

**Transition:** We rarely talk about this, but it was a much more common topic back in Peter’s day. Jesus returning a second time was an integral part of the message shared by believers when the New Testament church was launched starting at Pentecost and to this day. Peter, James, John, Paul, and others didn’t hesitate to mention that Jesus was coming back. Naturally, these new believers thought Jesus was coming back “soon,” like in their lifetime or maybe a generation later. But as the years went on, that wasn’t true. So some heard “Jesus is coming back a second time” as an empty promise.

So here we are. It has been 2017 years since Jesus ascended into heaven, and here we sit. Perhaps you’re asking, “When is He coming back?” Perhaps the second coming of Jesus is not a concern to you because you know that you’re saved through your profession of faith in Christ Jesus. So, you’re not worrying about when He’ll return. Your destiny is secured.

So here’s a word picture that came to mind as I was putting this lesson together: The “Expectancy Pendulum” [Draw a continuum: One end represents Jesus among the people, dies, is resurrected, then before He ascends into heaven, let’s **read Acts 1:1-11**. Then Jesus ascends into heaven, and you can imagine that there was a HIGH EXPECTANCY of his return, i.e. sooner than later. Believers talked about it. It was part of the message of hope to be with Christ. But as generations passed and Christ had still not returned a second time, the level of EXPECTANCY waned to the point of skepticism. Peter is writing believers who have started to question if it’s really true that Christ is returning. Now here we are, and I sense that EXPECTANCY IS LOW to the point it is hardly talked about. What are the statistical

probabilities that Jesus will return in our lifetime? .00000000000001% chance?! So what needs to happen for the second coming doctrine to start getting traction again? As generations pass, there will be signs that the end is near, i.e. more earthquakes, plagues, disease, terror, unimaginable evil. People who will be living in the generations to come may very well be looking for more hope, and this doctrine will become more relevant. It will be an important message of hope. (Show pendulum swinging to the other end of the continuum.)

Regardless of where you are on this doctrine, I believe **this lesson will help all of us deepen our appreciation of Christ's promise to come again BY looking at Peter's EXAMPLES of God's power to intervene in His world whenever He wants to.** Let's begin.

### **BOOK (NIV 1984):**

V.1:

- Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.

V.2:

- I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

V.3:

- First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.

V.4:

- They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

V.5:

- But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water.

V.6:

- By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.

V.7:

- By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

V.8:

- But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

V.9:

- The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q V.1: What was Peter's purpose in writing two letters? [As reminders to stimulate them to wholesome thinking.]

Q: What do you think Peter means by "wholesome thinking?" [Thinking that is more pure and aligned with God's truth. False teachers know how to lead others astray, and Peter was interested in helping his readers stay grounded in God's Word and teachings.]

Q: When you see a friend or family member struggling with negative or unhealthy thinking, how do you lead them to healthier thinking? [Give them truth; share examples of how God is faithful in our time of need]

Q V.2: As a continuation of v.1, what is Peter's corollary purpose in writing these two letters? [to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the commands given by the Lord through His apostles.]

Q: Let's think about our own walk with Christ. Why is it important that we recall the words spoken in the past by prophets and Jesus? [It helps us to live godly lives when we are aware of His teachings and commands and we obey them. We need to know and obey these words to help us stay grounded in God's Word.]

Q V.3: Peter warns that scoffers will show up "in the last days." What timeframe is represented by "the last days?" Consider this a Bible trivia question! [Peter defines living "in the last days" as the period of time between the Lord's First and Second Advents.]

Q: Who are the "scoffers?" [They are the false teachers who deny Jesus and His return. Jesus warned that these heretics would come in Matt 24:3-5, 11, 23-26]

Q V.4: What are the scoffers mocking? [They are questioning the second coming of Christ that was promised.]

Q: What's their argument? [Since nothing has happened in all this time, why expect the Lord's return now? Point of interest: "our fathers" = OT Patriarchs and to the beginning of creation.]

Q V.5-6: The scoffers have a point, right? But how does Peter rebut their argument? [they deliberately forget that long ago, by God's word, the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. These very waters were used by God to deluge and destroy the world that existed in the days of Noah.]

Observation: In simplest of terms, Peter is saying that God has the power to "break in" or intervene at any time and accomplish His will. He can send rain from heaven or fire from heaven. Just look at history: The creation of the world, and the destruction of the world by a flood.

Q V.7: If God's word had the power to create the heavens and earth, then God's word also has the power to do what? [God will destroy the earth with fire on the Day of Judgment and destroy ungodly men.]

**Peter proved his point:** God is able to intervene in the course of history. He did it in the past and He is able to do it again. The Day of the Lord that was promised by the prophets and Apostles, as well as by Jesus Christ, will come just as surely as the Flood came in Noah's day and the fire and brimstone came to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

Q V.8-9: Imagine a scoffer still arguing with Peter. Suppose a scoffer asks, “Then why has Christ delayed His return?” What does Peter explain to them?

- First, a day is like a thousand years to the Lord.
- Second, the Lord is being patient b/c He is not willing that anyone would perish. So He’s allowing time for sinners to repent. He wants lost sinners to be saved.

Q: What do we learn about God in these two verses?

- God is not bound by our time. He lives above and apart from time as we know it. CS Lewis calls it the “eternal now.” Therefore, God is not tardy!
- God is patient.
- God desires to see everyone be saved through repentance.
- God is working His plan.

**LOOK:**

God is delaying Christ’s return out of his love for the unsaved. We have all been called to share the gospel with those whom God has placed in our circles of influence. Let’s do our part to reach the lost.

**Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 461–466). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

#### **SCOFFING AT THE SCOFFERS**

### *2 Peter 3:1–10*

Everybody is ignorant,” said Will Rogers, “only on different subjects.”

How true, and yet that is not the whole story because there is more than one kind of ignorance. Some people are ignorant because of lack of opportunity to learn, or perhaps lack of ability to learn; others are (to use Peter’s phrase in 2 Peter 3:5) “willingly ... ignorant.” “Not ignorance, but ignorance of ignorance, is the death of knowledge,” said a famous philosopher, and he is right.

Peter has dealt with the character and conduct of the apostates in 2 Peter 2, and now he deals with their false teaching. Peter affirmed the certainty of Christ’s coming in glory (2 Peter 1:16ff), a truth that the apostates questioned and denied. In fact, they were scoffing at the very idea of the return of the Lord, the judgment of the world, and the establishment of a glorious kingdom.

How important it is for us as Christians to understand God’s truth! Today we are surrounded by scoffers, people who refuse to take the Bible seriously when it speaks about Christ’s return and the certainty of judgment. In this paragraph, Peter admonished his readers to understand three important facts about God and the promise of Christ’s coming.

#### **God’s Word Is True (2 Peter 3:1–4)**

It is possible to have a pure and sincere mind and yet have a bad memory! Peter wrote this second letter primarily to awaken and arouse his readers (2 Peter 1:12–15). It is easy for Christians to “get accustomed to God’s truth.” Eutychus went to sleep listening to Paul preach! (Acts 20:7–10) Our Heavenly Father sacrificed so that we might have the truth of the Word and the freedom to practice it, but too often we take this for granted and become complacent. The church needs to be aroused regularly lest the enemy find us asleep and take advantage of our spiritual lethargy.

Because God’s Word is true, we must pay attention to it and take its message seriously. New converts must be taught the Word and established in the doctrines of the faith, for new Christians are the apostate teacher’s primary targets. But older Christians must also be reminded of the importance of Bible doctrine and, in particular, the doctrines that relate to the return of Christ. Prophetic teaching must not lull us to sleep. Rather, it must awaken us to live godly lives and to seek to win the lost (Rom. 13:11–14).

What the Bible teaches about the Day of the Lord was not invented by the Apostles. The prophets taught it and so did our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:2). Peter emphasized the *unity* of the Word of God. When the scoffers denied “the power and coming” of Jesus Christ, they were denying the truth of the prophetic books, the teaching of our Lord in the Gospels, and the writing of the Apostles! Like our Lord’s seamless garment, the Scriptures cannot be cut apart without ruining the whole.

As far back as the days of Enoch, God warned that judgment was coming (Jude 14–15). Many of the Hebrew prophets announced the Day of the Lord and warned that the world would be judged (Isa. 2:10–22; 13:6–16; Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1; Joel; Amos 5:18–20; Zeph.; Zech. 12:1–

14:3). This period of judgment is also known as “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7) and the Tribulation.

Our Lord taught about this day of judgment in His sermon on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24–25). Paul discussed it in 1 Thessalonians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 1–2. The Apostle John described this terrible day in Revelation 6–19. It will be a time when God’s wrath will be poured out on the nations, and when Satan will be free to give vent to his anger and malice. It will culminate with the return of Jesus Christ in glory and victory.

While I do not make it a test of fellowship or spirituality, I personally believe that the people of God will be taken to heaven *before* this “great and terrible day” dawns.

I think we should carefully distinguish the various “days” mentioned in the Bible. “The Day of the Lord” is that day of judgment that climaxes with the return of Christ to the earth. “The Day of God” (2 Peter 3:12) is the period when God’s people enjoy the new heavens and the new earth, when all evil has been judged (1 Cor. 15:28). “The Day of Christ” relates to the coming of Christ for His church (1 Cor. 1:7–9; Phil. 1:10; 2:16).

Prophetic students seem to fall into three categories: those who believe the church will be raptured (“caught up together,” 1 Thes. 4:13ff) *before* the Day of the Lord; those who see this event taking place *in the middle of* the Day of the Lord, so that the church experiences the first half of the Tribulation; and those who believe the church will be raptured when the Lord returns *at the Tribulation’s close*. There are good and godly people in each group and our differences of interpretation must not create problems in fellowship or in sharing Christian love.

Not only does the Word of God predict the coming Day of the Lord, but it also predicts the appearance of the very scoffers who deny that Word! Their presence is proof that the Word they deny is the true Word of God! We should not be surprised at the presence of these apostate mockers (see Acts 20:28–31; 1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3).

A scoffer is someone who treats lightly that which ought to be taken seriously. The people in Noah’s day scoffed at the idea of a judgment, and the citizens of Sodom scoffed at the possibility of fire and brimstone destroying their sinful city. If you have tried at all to witness for Jesus Christ, you have no doubt met people who scoff at the idea of hell or a future day of judgment for this world.

Why do these apostates scoff? Because they want to continue living in their sins. Peter made it clear that false teachers cultivate “the lust of uncleanness” (2 Peter 2:10) and allure weak people by means of “the lusts of the flesh” (2 Peter 2:18). If your lifestyle contradicts the Word of God, you must either change your lifestyle or change the Word of God. The apostates choose the latter approach, so they scoff at the doctrines of judgment and the coming of the Lord.

What is their argument? The uniformity of the world. “Nothing cataclysmic has happened in the past,” they argue, “so there is no reason to believe it will happen in the future.” They take the “scientific approach” by examining evidence, applying reason, and drawing a conclusion. The fact that they *willfully ignore* a good deal of evidence does not seem to disturb them.

The scientific approach works admirably in matters that relate to the material universe, but you cannot take Bible prophecy into a laboratory and treat it as though it were another hypothesis. For that matter, the so-called “laws of science” are really only educated conclusions based on a limited number of experiments and tests. These laws are generalizations, always subject to change, because no scientist can perform an infinite number of experiments to prove his claim. Nor can he completely control all the factors involved in the experiments and in his own thinking.

The Word of God is still “a light that shineth in a dark [squalid] place” (2 Peter 1:19). We can trust it. No matter what the scoffers may claim, God’s day of judgment will come on the world, and Jesus Christ shall return to establish His glorious kingdom.

### **God’s Work Is Consistent (2 Peter 3:5–7)**

How did Peter refute the foolish argument of the apostate scoffers? “God does not interrupt the operation of His stable creation!” they argued. “The promise of Christ’s coming is not true!” All Peter did was remind them of what God had done in the past and thus prove that His work is consistent throughout the ages. Peter simply presented evidence that the false teachers *deliberately* ignored. It is amazing how so-called “thinkers” (scientists, liberal theologians, philosophers) will be *selective* and deliberately refuse to consider certain data.

Peter cited two events in history to prove his point: the work of God at Creation (2 Peter 3:5), and the flood in Noah’s day (2 Peter 3:6).

God created the heavens and the earth by His word. The phrase “and God said” occurs nine times in Genesis 1. “For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9). Not only was Creation *made* by the word of God, but it was *held together* by that same word. Kenneth Wuest translates 2 Peter 3:5 to bring out this subtle meaning: “For concerning this they willfully forget that heavens existed from ancient times, and land [standing] out of water, and by means of water cohering by the word of God.”

Peter’s argument is obvious: the same God who created the world by His word can also intervene in His world and do whatever He wishes to do! It is His word that made it and that holds it together, and His word is all-powerful.

The second event Peter cited was Noah’s flood (2 Peter 3:6). He had already referred to the Flood as an illustration of divine judgment (2 Peter 2:5), so there was no need to go into detail. The Flood was a cataclysmic event; in fact, the Greek word translated “overflowed” gives us our English word *cataclysm*. The people living on earth had probably never seen a rainstorm or the fountains of the deep broken up, but these events happened just the same. Their “scientists” could have argued as the scoffers argued, “Everything goes on as it did from the beginning. Life is uniform so nothing unusual can happen.” But it happened!

God has the power to “break in” at any time and accomplish His will. He can send rain from heaven or fire from heaven. “But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased” (Ps. 115:3).

Having established the fact that God has in the past “interrupted” the course of history, Peter was then ready for his application in 2 Peter 2:7. The same word that created and sustains the world is now holding it together, stored with fire, being preserved and reserved for that future day of judgment. God promised that there would be no more floods to destroy the world (Gen. 9:8–17). The next judgment will be a judgment of fire.

The phrase “stored with fire” used by Kenneth Wuest (“reserved unto fire,” KJV) sounds very modern. Modern atomic science has revealed that the elements that make up the world are stored with power. There is enough atomic energy in a glass of water to run a huge ocean liner. Man has discovered this great power and, as a result, the world seems to teeter on the brink of atomic destruction. However, Peter seems to indicate that *man* will not destroy the world by his sinful abuse of atomic energy. It is *God* who will “push the button” at the right time and burn up the old creation and all the works of sinful man with it; then He will usher in the new heavens and earth and reign in glory.

Everything in God's original creation was good. It is man's sin that has turned a good creation into a *groaning* creation (Rom. 8:18–22). God could not permit sinful man to live in a perfect environment, so He had to curse the ground because of man (Gen. 3:14–19). Since that time, man has been busy polluting and destroying God's creation. For years, it appeared that this exploitation would not cause too much trouble, but now we are changing our minds. The balance of nature has been upset; valuable resources have been wasted; the supply of energy is running down; and civilization is facing a crisis. The prophets of doom today are not only preachers and evangelists, but also sociologists, ecologists, and atomic scientists.

Peter proved his point: God is able to intervene in the course of history. He did it in the past and He is able to do it again. The Day of the Lord that was promised by the prophets and Apostles, as well as by Jesus Christ, will come just as surely as the Flood came in Noah's day and the fire and brimstone came to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

But the scoffers had their argument ready: "Then why the delay?" The promise of Christ's coming and the judgment of the world has been around for centuries, and it is yet to be fulfilled. Has God changed His mind? The world today is certainly ripe for judgment! Thus, Peter's third fact.

### **God's Will Is Merciful (2 Peter 3:8–10)**

Once again, Peter exposed the ignorance of the scoffers. Not only were they ignorant of what God had done in the past (2 Peter 3:5), but they were also ignorant of what God was like. They were making God in their own image and ignoring the fact that God is eternal. This means that He has neither beginning nor ending. Man is immortal: he has a beginning but not an ending. He will live forever either in heaven or hell. But God is eternal, without beginning or ending, and He dwells in eternity. Eternity is not just "extended time." Rather, it is existence *above and apart from time*.

Peter was certainly referring to Psalm 90:4—"For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." Isaac Watts used Psalm 90 as the basis for the familiar hymn, "O God, Our Help in Ages Past."

A thousand ages, in Thy sight  
Are like an evening gone;  
Short as the watch that ends the night,

Before the rising sun.

Since a thousand years are as one day to the Lord, we cannot accuse Him of delayed fulfillment of His promises. In God's sight, the whole universe is only a few days old! He is not limited by time the way we are, nor does He measure it according to man's standards. When you study the works of God, especially in the Old Testament, you can see that He is never in a hurry, but He is never late.

He could have created the entire universe in an instant, yet He preferred to do it over a period of six days. He could have delivered Israel from Egypt in a moment, yet He preferred to invest eighty years in training Moses. For that matter, He could have sent the Saviour much sooner, but He waited until "the fullness of the time was come" (Gal. 4:4). While God works *in* time, He is not limited *by* time.



To God, a thousand years is as one day, and one day as a thousand years. God can accomplish in one day what it would take others a millennium to accomplish! He waits to work, but once He begins to work, He gets things done!

The scoffers did not understand God's eternity nor did they understand His mercy. Why was God delaying the return of Christ and the coming of the Day of the Lord? It was not because He was *unable* to act or *unwilling* to act. He was not tardy or off schedule! Nobody on earth has the right to decide when God must act. God is sovereign in all things and does not need prodding or even counsel from sinful man (Rom. 11:33–36).

God delays the coming of Christ and the great day of fiery judgment because He is long-suffering and wants to give lost sinners the opportunity to be saved. “And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation” (2 Peter 3:15).

God's “delay” is actually an indication that He has a plan for this world and that He is working His plan. There should be no question in anybody's mind whether God *wants* sinners to be saved. God “is not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9). First Timothy 2:4 affirms that God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” These verses give both the negative and the positive, and together they assure us that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11). He shows His mercy to all (Rom. 11:32) even though not all will be saved.

It is worth noting that God revealed this same long-suffering in the years before the Flood (1 Peter 3:20). He saw the violence and wickedness of man and could have judged the world immediately; yet He held back His wrath and, instead, sent Noah as a “preacher of righteousness.” In the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, God patiently waited while Abraham interceded for the cities and He would have spared them had He found ten righteous people in Sodom.

If God is long-suffering toward lost sinners, why did Peter write, “The Lord ... is long-suffering to us-ward”? Who is meant by “us-ward”? It would appear that God is long-suffering *to His own people!*

Perhaps Peter was using the word *us* in a general way, meaning “mankind.” But it is more likely that he was referring to his readers as the elect of God (1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:10). God is long-suffering toward lost sinners because some of them *will* believe and become a part of God's elect people. We do not know who God's elect are among the unsaved people of the world, nor are we supposed to know. Our task is to make our *own* “calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10; cf. Luke 13:23–30). The fact that God has His elect people is an encouragement to us to share the Good News and seek to win others to Christ.

God was even long-suffering toward the scoffers of that day! They needed to repent and He was willing to save them. This is the only place where Peter used the word *repentance* in either of his letters, but that does not minimize its importance. To repent simply means “to change one's mind.” It is not “regret,” which usually means “being sorry I got caught.” Nor is it “remorse,” which is a hopeless attitude that can lead to despair.

Repentance is a change of mind that results in an action of the will. If the sinner honestly changes his mind about sin, he will turn from it. If he sincerely changes his mind about Jesus Christ, he will turn to Him, trust Him, and be saved. “Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21) is God's formula for salvation.

The word translated “come” at the end of 2 Peter 3:9 carries the meaning of “make room for.” It is translated “contain” in John 2:6 and 21:25. The lost sinner needs to “make room” for repentance in his heart by putting away his pride and meekly receiving the Word of God.

Repentance is a gift from God (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25), but the unbeliever must make room for the gift.

As you review Peter's arguments, you can see that his evidence is irrefutable. He pointed out that the scoffers willfully rejected evidence in order that they might continue in their sins and scoffing. He proved from the Scriptures that God has intervened in past history, and that He has the power to do it today. He showed that the scoffers had a very low view of God's character because they thought He delayed in keeping His promises just as men do. Finally, he explained that God does not live in the realm of human time, and that His so-called "delay" only gives more opportunity for lost sinners to repent and be saved.

Having refuted their false claims, Peter then reaffirmed the certainty of the coming of the Day of the Lord. When will it come? Nobody knows when, because it will come to the world "as a thief in the night." Our Lord used this phrase (Matt. 24:43; Luke 12:39) and so did the Apostle Paul (1 Thes. 5:2ff). When the world is feeling secure, then God's judgment will fall. The thief does not warn his victims that he is coming! "For when they shall say, 'Peace and safety'; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (1 Thes. 5:3).

We do not know *when* it will happen, but we are told *what* will happen. Kenneth Wuest gives an accurate and graphic translation of these words: "In which the heavens with a rushing noise will be dissolved, and the elements being scorched will be dissolved, and the earth also and the works in it will be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10).

Many Bible students believe that Peter here described the action of atomic energy being released by God. The word translated *a great noise* in the *King James Version* means "with a hissing and a crackling sound." When the atomic bomb was tested in the Nevada desert, more than one reporter said that the explosion gave forth "a whirring sound," or a "crackling sound." The Greek word Peter used was commonly used by the people for the whirring of a bird's wings or the hissing of a snake.

The word *melt* in 2 Peter 3:10 means "to disintegrate, to be dissolved." It carries the idea of something being broken down into its basic elements, and that is what happens when atomic energy is released. "Heaven and earth shall pass away," said our Lord (Matt. 24:35), and it appears that this may happen by the release of the atomic power stored in the elements that make up the world. The heavens and earth are "stored with fire" (2 Peter 3:7, WUEST), and only God can release it.

For this reason, I do not personally believe that God will permit sinful men to engage in an earth-destroying atomic war. He will, I believe, overrule the ignorance and foolishness of men including well-meaning but unbelieving diplomats and politicians, so that He alone will have the privilege of "pushing the button" and dissolving the elements to make way for a new heaven and a new earth. Peter no doubt had in mind Old Testament passages such as Isaiah 13:10–11; 24:19; 34:4; and 64:1–4 when he wrote these words. The first passage is especially emphatic that *God* will bring judgment and not sinful man. "And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity," says the Lord. It does not sound as though He will give this task to some nervous military leader or some angry politician.

Of course, this great explosion and conflagration will not touch the "heaven of heavens" where God dwells. It will destroy the earth and the atmospheric heavens around it, the universe as we know it; this will make room for the new heavens and earth (2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1ff).

Man's great works will also be burned up! All of the things that man boasts about—his great cities, his great buildings, his inventions, his achievements—will be destroyed in a moment of

time. When sinners stand before the throne of God, they will have nothing to point to as evidence of their greatness. It will all be gone.

This is certainly a solemn truth, and we dare not study it in cavalier fashion. In the remaining verses of this letter, Peter will apply this truth to our daily living. But it would be wise for us to pause now and consider: where will I be when God destroys the world? Is what I am living for only destined to go up in an atomic cloud, to vanish forever? Or am I doing the will of God so that my works will glorify Him forever?

Make your decision now—before it is too late.

**Raymer, R. M. (1985). 1 Peter. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 874-876). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

## V. The Christian Hope: The Lord's Return (3:1–16)

Few people like to wait, but that is precisely what God calls believers to do as they anticipate the Lord's return. Three times the word *prosdokaō*, “look(ing) forward,” appears in this chapter (vv. 12–14). This is the same Greek word translated “expect” in Luke 12:46. Waiting is to be coupled with watching.

First-century Christians were close to the words of the Old Testament prophets about Christ's second coming, to which were added the promises of the Lord Himself and the constant reminders of apostles such as Peter in letters like this. Second Peter 3:1–16 presents five facts about or perspectives on the Lord's return.

### A. *Believers remember it (3:1–2).*

3:1. Addressing his readers as **Dear friends** (*agapētoi*, “beloved, loved ones”; the first of four occurrences in this chapter: vv. 1, 8, 14, 17; cf. Jude 17–18), Peter called this his **second letter** to this group, and said **both** letters are **reminders**. Many scholars assume that the earlier letter is 1 Peter. But some suggest that calling 1 Peter a “reminder” does not suit its contents. Of greater importance, however, is Peter's purpose: **to stimulate you to wholesome thinking**. “As reminders to stimulate you” translates the same Greek words which are rendered “to refresh your memory” in 2 Peter 1:13. The phrase *eilikrinē dianoian* (“wholesome thinking”) may also be rendered “sincere mind” or “pure disposition.” (*Eilikrinēs* occurs elsewhere in the NT only in Phil. 1:10, where it means “pure.”) The English “sincere” is from the Latin words *sine cera*, “without wax.” Some pottery salesmen would use wax to cover cracks and weak places in pottery. Such a cover-up could be detected only by holding the jug up to the sun to see if any weaknesses were visible. Such a vase was “sun-judged” (the lit. meaning of the Gr. *eilikrinēs*). God wants His people to have sun-judged minds, not those in which their sin spots have been covered over.

3:2. Peter again reminded his readers of the need to remember (cf. 1:12–15). Others, like Peter, referred to **the holy prophets** (cf. Luke 1:70; Acts 3:21; Eph. 3:5), whose **words** were oracles regarding the day of the Lord and related topics. **The command of our Lord and Savior** refers to His teachings, which were then proclaimed by the **apostles** (cf. Jude 17). Peter's linking the prophets and apostles placed them on the same level of authority (cf. Eph. 2:20). This also suits Peter's earlier purpose of distinguishing the true servants of the Lord from the false. Believers do well **to recall the** writings of both Testaments regarding the Lord's return.

B. *Scoffers laugh at it (3:3–7).*

3:3. Peter understood that he and his readers were living **in the last days**, the period of time between the Lord's First and Second Advents. **First of all** means "above all" (as in 1:20), foremost in importance. **Scoffers** are the false teachers who deny Jesus Christ (2:1) and His return (3:4). Jesus had said these heretics would come (Matt. 24:3–5, 11, 23–26), and Paul had written the same (1 Tim. 4:1–3; 2 Tim. 3:1–9). Peter echoed the warning, adding that their **scoffing** is accompanied by **their ... evil desires** (*epithymias*, also used in 2 Peter 1:4; 2:10, 18; Jude 16, 18). Arrogant snobbery and disdain for the idea of a coming judgment led to sexual perversion.

3:4. Their mocking took the form of a stinging question: **Where is this "coming" He promised?** Rejecting this promise, so often repeated in the New Testament (John 14:1–3; Acts 1:11; 1 Cor. 15:23; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6; 1 Thes. 3:13; 4:14–18; 2 Thes. 1:10; 2:1; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; James 5:7) rests on the principle of uniformitarianism. This is the view that the cosmic processes of the present and the future can be understood solely on the basis of how the cosmos has operated in the past. There is almost an incipient deism here which rules out divine intervention in the universal order. In a universe governed by natural laws miracles, mockers argue, simply cannot happen. Therefore they say Jesus Christ could not come again.

The scoffers wanted to push their argument as far back as possible. So they referred to **our fathers** (lit., "the fathers"), that is, Old Testament patriarchs (John 7:22; Acts 3:13; 13:32; Rom. 9:5; 11:28; Heb. 1:1), and to **the beginning of Creation**. Since nothing has happened in all this time, mockers reasoned, why expect the Lord's return now?

3:5–6. Peter met those arguments head on by reviewing some ancient history. Just as water by God's command played a significant role in the early formation of the earth, so **water** also was the agent for destruction of the earth at God's command. **The heavens existed** refers to the expanse or sky created on the second day of Creation (Gen. 1:6–8); **and the earth was formed out of water and with water** refers to the land appearing from the water on the third day of Creation (Gen. 1:9–10).

God the Creator is also God the Judge. In His sovereign will, any change in process can occur at any time for He designed and controls these "natural" processes. The scoffers **deliberately** (*thelontas*, "willingly") **forget** God's Creation and the Flood, an interesting contrast with Peter's constant reminders to his readers to "remember" (2 Peter 1:12–13, 15; 3:1–2, 8). The scoffers deliberately put aside **God's Word** and then complained that God was not doing anything. Interestingly Peter was both a creationist and a believer in the universal Flood (cf. his other references to the Flood: 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5).

At the beginning of 3:6 the words "by water" are literally, "through which." This may refer back to "God's Word" (at the end of v. 5 in Gr.), or it may refer to both water and the Word. But God's use of water in both Creation and destruction seems to lend credence to the NIV rendering. **The world** (*kosmos*) refers to inhabitants, since the earth itself was not destroyed in the Flood. Similarly in John 3:16 "the world" (*kosmos*) means the globe's inhabitants (cf. John 1:9; 3:17, 19; 4:42; 6:33; 7:7; 15:18–19; 17:14, 21, 23, 25; 1 John 2:2; 3:13; 4:14).

3:7. Verses 7, 10, and 12 are the only places where the New Testament depicts the future destruction of the world by fire. In the past the world was destroyed in the Flood by God's Word

and by water; in the future it will be destroyed **by the same Word** and by **fire**. Having decided to judge the world (cf. 2:3–4, 9, 17), God is simply holding the earth on layaway. It is **reserved** (*tethēsaourismenoi*, “being stored up like a treasure”) **for fire** and **kept** (*tēroumenoi*, “guarded” or “held”) for judgment. Isaiah (66:15–16) and Malachi (4:1) associated fire with the return of the Lord. References to it are also found in the Qumran literature (Dead Sea Scrolls) as well as other sources shortly before and after Christ’s birth. “The day of the Lord” (2 Peter 3:10) includes the Tribulation, the Millennium, the great white throne judgment, and the destruction of **the present heavens and earth**. At the great white throne after the Millennium, **ungodly men** (i.e., the wicked dead) will be judged and then thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11–15). This, as Peter wrote, will be their **day of judgment** (cf. 2 Peter 2:9) **and destruction**. After they are cast into fire, the heavens and the earth will be destroyed by fire. God intervened catastrophically before (in the Flood), and He will do so again.

### C. *God guarantees it (3:8–9).*

3:8–9. Why should the Lord be so long in coming? Peter offered two answers. First, God counts time differently than does man. Once again Peter appealed to their memories (**do not forget this one thing**). The scoffers forget (v. 5), but believers should not. Christians should recall Psalm 90:4, which Peter quoted. People see time against time; but God sees time against eternity. In fact time only seems long because of man’s finite perspective. **With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.**

Some suggest that this statement argues against premillennialism. They point out that the concept of 1,000 years is not to be taken literally since it is merely a comparative time reference. However, the literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth is strongly affirmed in Revelation 20:1–6 (see comments there). Peter was simply using a simile. What to people, including scoffers, may seem like a long time is to the Lord very short. The present Church Age has lasted, in God’s eyes, not quite two days!

The second reason the Lord’s return seems to be so long in coming is that God wants as many people to be saved as possible (2 Peter 3:9). **The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise**. The words “is ... slow” translate *bradynei* (“hesitate, linger, delay”), used only here in the New Testament. Again Peter gave a divine-human comparison (cf. v. 8). God’s so-called “tardiness” as viewed by some people (**as some understand slowness**) is only a delay with respect to their time schedules, not His. In fact God’s time schedule is modified by patience, a major attribute of the heavenly Father (cf. v. 15; Rom. 2:4; 9:22).

The words **not wanting** (*mē boulomenos*) **anyone to perish** do not express a decree, as if God has willed everyone to be saved. Universal salvation is not taught in the Bible. Instead those words describe God’s wishes or desires; He longs that all would be saved (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4) but knows that many reject Him.